

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1427

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 8308

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UN, OAU, NI XF

SUBJECT: ISRAELI AMBASSADOR'S DISCUSSION WITH HEAD OF STATE

REF: LAGOS 8305

SUMMARY: IN LONG CONVERSATION WITH ISRAELI AMBASSADOR, GENERAL GOSON TAKES NIGERIA CLOSER TO BREAK IN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL.

1. DURING WEEKEND ISRAELI AMBASSADOR YISSAKHAR BEN-YAACOV FILLED ME IN ON HIS OCTOBER 12 MEETING WITH GENERAL GOWON, WHICH LASTED EIGHTY MINUTES, THIRTY OF WHICH WERE A PERSONALLY FRIENDLY BUT TOUGHLY WORDED GOWON SOLILOQUY ON THE JUSTICE OF THE ARAB CAUSE AND THE DEEP-SEATED ARROGANCE AND INTRANSIGENCE OF ISRAEL. GOWON DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A LONG-SUFFERING, GENUINE FRIEND OF ISRAEL WHO EVEN NOW PERSONALLY FEELS THAT RELATIONS SHOULD BE MAINTAINED, BUT ISRAEL HAS DRIVEN HIM TO THE WALL AND SEEMS BENT ON LEAVING HIM NO ALTERNATIVE EXCEPT TO BREAK. HE HAS BEEN ABLE THUS FAR TO WITHSTAND THE PRESSURES OF HIS OAU BROTHERS, BUT TIME IS RUNNING OUT. UNEQUIVOCALLY STATED THAT HE WILL BREAK RELATIONS IF THE ISRAELI ARMY GOES CLOSE TO DAMASCUS, CONTINUES WANTON BOMBING OF INNOCENT ARAB CIVILIANS, OR DARES INFLICT
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"ANY DEVASTATIO" ON THE TERRITORY OF OAU MEMBER EGYPT.

2. BEN-YAACOV FINALLY GIVEN A CHANCE TO SPEAK AND PROCEED TO TALK "FACT" INSTEAD OF "SENTIMENTS." ASKED WHETHER GOWON UNDERSTOOD WHO STARTED PRESENT CONFLICT. GOWON WAS DISCONCERTED, HESITATED SEVERAL SECONDS, AND REPLIED THAT CURRENT STRUGGLE MERELY CONTINUATION OF 1967 WAR, ARABS HAVING PERFECT RIGHT RECOVER TERRITORY LOST TO EARLIER ISRAELI AGGRESSION. BEN-YAACOV DISMISSED REPLY AS FRENCH-INSPIRED SOPHISTRY, WAS UNCERTAIN THAT GOWON GOT THE POINT, BUT QUITE CERTAIN GOWON NOT PERSUADED. AMBASSADORA

MOVED ON TOHD MQNIYBOUT NATION'S RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF. GOWON GRANTED THE RIGHT TO BOTH SIDES BUT STATEDKHISRAELI DEFENSE IS SUPERIOR ARMS AND NOT THE SO-CALLED JUST BORDERS MRS. MEIR ANDQXOTHERS HAVE SO LONG TALKED ABOUT. BEN-YAACOV ASKED WHETHER THIS ARGUMENT NOT "LUDICROUS" IN LIGHT MILITARY EVENTS LAST SEVERAG EDAYS. YES, SOMETHING TO HIS OBSERVATIONS GOWON SAID, BUT ISRAEL BROUGHT ON ITS WHOLE PROBLEM BY BEING HARDHEADED. AFRICAN WISE MEN HAD TOLD MRS. MEIR AS MUSH BACK IN 1971; GOWON KNEW, HE WAS THERE.

3. GIVING UP ON "FACTS", BEN-YAACOV SAID HE TRIED GENTLE FLATTERY. THE GREAT STRENGTH OF NIGERIA TO DATE IS THAT THIS RIGHT, INFLUENTIAL NATIONS MAINTAINS CONTACT WITH BOTH SIDES; MRS.MEIR WELCOMES NIGERIAN COUNSEL AND SO PRESUMABLY DOES SADAT. ANY BREAK IN RELATIONS ROBS NIGERIA OF THE INFLUENCE THAT NOT EVEN THE COMMITTED GREAT POWOERS, THE U.S. AND RUSSIA, HAVE IN BOTH BELD GURED CAMPS. GOWON ACKNOWLEDGED HAVING INFLUENCE WITH SADAT AND HASSAD, BUT A MRS. MEIR HEADED TOWARD DAMASCUS SEEMED JUST AS DISINCLINED TO HEED COUNSEL TODAY AS SHE DID IN 1971.

4. FINALLY, BEN-YAACOVJO ACTING UNDER INSTRUCTIONS, OFFERED BRING HIGH-LEVLE EMISSARY FROM JERUSALEM TO BRIEF GOWON AND TO SEEK HIS COUNSEL. GOWON THOUGHT THAT THIS TRIP WOULD BE UNNECESSARY BECAUSE NO VISITOR COULD POSSIBLE IMPROVE ON THE COGENT EXPOSITION THAT THE AMBASSADOR HIMSELF HAD GIVEN. FURTHER, GOWON COULD NOT AFFORD TO RECEIVE ANY ISRAELI VISITOR AS LONG AS CURRENT CONFLICT CONTINUESWI

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5. CONVERSATION CLOSED BY GOWON REPEATING THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND NIGERIA NOW "IN JEOPARDY," AND THE FMG "WILL BREAK RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL" IF THERE IS ANY FURTHER ENCROACHMENT (BEYOND 1967 LINES) ON ARAB TERRITORY. BEN-YAACOV THOUGHT THAT IN EXPRESSING THIS FORMULATION GOWON WAS UNWITTINGLY INEXACT. THE ISRAELI CAME AWAY UNDERSTANDING THAT "DECIDED MILITARY PROGRESS" AGAINST SYRIA AND EGYPT WILL PRESIPITATE A BREAK IN RELATIONS.

6. COMMENT: DURING A THREE-WEEK PERIOD BEN-YAACOV, IN ASSESSING ISRAEL'S CHANCES TO MAINTAIN RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA, HAS MOVED FROM "REASONABLE CONFIDENCE" TO "LESS HOPEFUL" TO YESTERDAY'S "VIRTUALLY HOPELESS." I CAN NOT IMPROVE ON HIS PRSFENTHPAPPRAISAL: "IF WE CAN MANAGE TO LOSE THIS WAR, WE WILL MAINTAIN RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA."
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